

1. Introduction

These guidelines have been prepared for teachers intending to use blogs in AACPS schools. The guidelines have been adapted from several resources on the Internet, primarily, the TAFE NSW – North Sydney Institute (NSI), Australia. These guidelines aim to provide teachers with an overview of issues relevant to using blogs in the classroom. These guidelines are not exhaustive and do not cover every situation that can arise in the open and networked environment, but should be used along with common sense to provide a safe and reliable experience for all students.

2. What is a Blog?

A blog (web log) is a frequent chronological publication of personal thoughts, weblinks and/or photos. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject. Most blogs are text-based, although some focus on photos (photoblog/moblog), videos (vblog) or audio (podcasting). The author controls whether or not it is interactive (allowing comments). Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news.

3. More on Blogs

Blogs are best thought of as a way to present information or points of view to the world or in our case (AACPS) to a select group of students. The traditional blog is written in the form of an online journal and includes the writer's thoughts on a subject, links to interesting information, and often pictures. The author or co-authors may post new items several times a day, depending on the structure. Approved contributors may comment on blog posts so that a discussion ensues.

4. Are blogs appropriate for educational delivery?

Blogs are examples of *Web 2* social software. They can facilitate an eLearning environment in which teachers facilitate and students contribute to their own learning experiences. The software provides flexible access to resources and fosters collaboration in a way that enriches educational delivery. They can be used to stimulate thinking outside of regular class time or as the basis for beginning new classroom discussions and/or reviewing previous class content.

There is a lot of emerging literature regarding the potential of blogs as learning spaces. The majority conclude that these social software tools can be a transformational technology for teaching and learning if used appropriately.

Blogs are tools supporting a social constructivist theory of learning. Social constructivism, a variety of cognitive constructivism, contends that knowledge is actively created by social relationships and interactions, emphasising a collaborative model for learning. This networked learning is particularly suitable for our Google generation learners, accustomed to formal and informal ways of getting information that are asynchronous, fast, free and available on demand.

5. Open or closed communities?

In establishing a blog, the owner (teacher) controls who can view or contribute to the site. Teachers should ensure that the students are aware of who is able to view and post to the site. The following summarises the typical options available for use of a blog:

- a. Closed – only users approved by the owner can read
- b. Semi-closed – only users approved by the owner can read and/or post
- c. Semi-open – anyone can read, but only approved users can post
- d. Open – anyone can read and/or post (including the general public)

AACPS requires that teachers using blogs establish a Closed or Semi-closed space; thus only allowing the teacher and students to view any of the posted writings.

Teachers must take care to ensure that the privacy of users is not compromised and that content posted to the site does not breach any other policies or laws, such as copyright or defamation. Further, in allowing students to post, it is essential that they have some understanding of issues related to privacy, plagiarism, codes of conduct and responsible publishing.

6. General guidelines

The following general statements aim to articulate issues for which all users of blogs should be aware of.

- Blogs are about ideas – therefore, agree or disagree with the idea, not the person
- Constructive criticism and evidence should be used to support any position. Generalisation should be avoided. Sentences that start with words like “All” (e.g., “All teachers”, “All administrators”, “All liberals”, “All conservatives”) are typically going to be too general.
- Members should blog safely and avoid posting personal information including: last names, dates of birth, addresses, or phone numbers. (Only student first names or initials may be used in AACPS.)
- Linking to websites from your blog or blog comments in support of your argument is an excellent idea, but never link to something without reading the entire article to make sure it is appropriate
- All outside sources used in posts should be properly cited and quoted, in order to avoid plagiarism
- Basic rules of Netiquette and Digital Citizenship apply. The use of blogs is an extension of a web society, the society being made up of the group members forming their own group guidelines in a public education context. Therefore any speech that is considered inappropriate in society and public education is inappropriate on a blog that’s part of an education network. This includes swearing, racist, sexist or discriminatory remarks and personal attacks.

7. Characteristics of successful bloggers

- Posts or comments are well written. This includes not only good content, but also follows writing conventions including spelling, grammar and punctuation
- Posts or comments are responsive to other people’s ideas – whether it is a post by the teacher or student in a different class. The power of blogs is in their connectedness – they are connected to a larger community of ideas
- Posts or comments include textual references to support opinions. Adding quotes or links to other works strengthens their response

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- Users post frequently, participating fully and consistently in the dialogue
 - Users are respectful of others. It's okay to disagree and criticise, as long as you do it constructively and don't make your criticisms personal. Remember you are criticising the idea, not the person. When you have disagreements in the blogging environment, be as civil and respectful as you would in real life.

8. Sample code of ethics

It is strongly suggested that teachers post to their blog site an explicit statement regarding the ethical behaviour expected of students contributing to the site.

The following sample code of ethics is provided to assist teachers in preparing this. This is a modified version of the A Blogger's Code of Ethics originally from the Forrester Best Practices report, *Blogging: Bubble Or Big Deal: When And How Businesses Should Use Blogs* (<http://www.forrester.com/Research/Document/Excerpt/0,7211,35000,00.html>)

- a. I will tell the truth.
- b. I will write deliberately and with accuracy.
- c. I will acknowledge and correct mistakes promptly.
- d. I will preserve the original post, using notations to show where I have made changes so as to maintain the integrity of my publishing.
- e. I will never delete a post.
- f. I will not delete comments unless they are spam or off-topic.
- g. I will reply to emails and comments when appropriate and do so promptly.
- h. I will strive for high quality with every post – including basic spellchecking.
- i. I will stay on topic.
- j. I will disagree with other opinions respectfully.
- k. I will link to online references and original source materials directly.
- l. I will disclose conflicts of interest.
- m. I will keep private issues and topics private, since discussing private issues would jeopardise my personal and work relationships.